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ABSTRACT

Female instructors and female teaching assistants are still struggling to receive recognition as men's equals in academic circles. Although many obvious barriers have fallen, more base and personal forms of discrimination and harassment still exist. Women are trivialized in the professional system and are devalued by the administration. Students also discriminate against female teachers and teaching assistants, but in different ways. Female instructors are evaluated by students on different criteria than male instructors: for example, an "aggressive" teaching style is valued in men, but not in women. Research has indicated that "contrapower harassment" also occurs: female teaching assistants are the victims of undue attention, obscene telephone calls from students, verbal sexual comments, body language, written sexual comments, physical advances, explicit sexual propositions, and sexual bribery. The question of why students feel the need to harass female instructors seems to stem from the male student's difficulty in accepting women in power. Ways to bring about some relief to female professors and teaching assistants include: making faculty aware of the problem; striving to recognize and eliminate the "micro-inequities"; showing students that the faculty and administration no longer devalue female instructors; and recognizing that sexual harassment occurs in the classroom. (RS)

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Vestals or Victims:
Suggestions for the Female Teaching Assistant

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In the temple of education, he who holds the grade book, holds the power. This has been an understood, if unvoiced, axiom of teaching. However, in today's educational system, a very minute part of this axiom excludes a large number of people from receiving the power the grade book should bestow. That word is "he". Female instructors are still struggling to receive the recognition as equals in academic circles. Female teaching assistants must also face those struggles.

Studies have shown that "female faculty must try harder than their male colleagues to convince students that they are both well prepared and likable (Kierstead 344)." In the faculty offices, studies have shown that women are discriminated against in subtle ways, "...ways that communicate to women that they are not quite first class citizens in the academic community (Sandler and Hall 1)." Women in education must overcome more than simply learning the material, and being able to communicate that material to the students; they must also overcome the subtle and not so subtle discrimination by gender.

The young novices in education, the teaching assistants, must be prepared to face the struggle women in education face. Martin Anderson, in his book Impostors in the Temple indicates that the teaching assistant system should be removed. But, the problems women instructors face, may be easier to deal with if early exposure to the hardships women endure in the

educational system is granted. With the difficulties doubled for female teaching assistants, these are the instructors of the future which will have better coping techniques and perhaps solutions to the problems women face in education.

In the power struggle, as women have fought, female teaching assistants have floundered. As a whole, teaching assistants receive less money, less benefits, and less respect than other faculty. For female TAs this difficulty of receiving respect and power is increased for the same reasons female faculty members have difficulty receiving respect and power. The "chilly climate (Sandler and Hall 1)" for women faculty only gets colder for female TAs who have less education, less recognition, and less faculty power to combat it.

The most obvious area in which female professors and teaching assistants have difficulty receiving due power is in the faculty structure. This is not too different from the discrimination and harassment faced in offices and jobs in other businesses. And although "the door to academe is now open and many obvious barriers have fallen (Sandler and Hall 2)", more base and personal forms of discrimination and harassment still exist.

The everyday discrimination occurs on levels not obvious unless one looks for them because people are so used to them. Bernice R. Sandler and Roberta M. Hall referred to those types of problems in their study, "The Campus Climate Revisited: Chilly for Women Faculty, Administrators, and Graduate Students" calling them "Micro-inequities (3)". They explain that,

> "Micro-inequities refer collectively to ways in which individuals are either singled out, or overlooked, ignored, or otherwise discounted on the basis of unchangeable characteristics such as sex, race, or age (Sandler and Hall 3)."

Some of these "Micro-inequities" are minute but disturbing, such as people giving men more attention and non-verbal feedback to male speakers, women being interrupted more often and for more trivial reasons than men, and people responding more to male comments in discussion groups than female comments (Sandler and Hall 3).

Also in the professional system, women are trivialized. Instead of paying attention to a woman's ideas, respecting her authority and treating her equally among male counterparts, minor, irrelevant aspects of her life become important. Her appearance, personal qualities and relationships become important instead of her achievements (Sandler and Hall 3). Men may be introduced as a having a strong background in research, while women are more likely to be introduced as having children, or being pleasant, and her personal life, as opposed to a male's personal life, becomes a topic for conversation. When menial tasks need to be done, women are asked to "write invitations or provide refreshments for department meetings and parties (Sandler and Hall 3)" Women are expected to behave in a "feminine" way, assertiveness becomes "bitchiness", strong confidence may indicate to others that she is "power hungry". She also faces others "using stereotyped words to describe accomplishments or behavior, especially words not applied to men (Sandler and Hall 3)." Comments about how she is angry

or uncooperative because "it must be that time of the month" or that she is not an "excellent teacher" but "charming with her students" (Sandler and Hall 3), can be heard in such situations.

Another problem women face in the administration is devaluation. Women must face their work and accomplishments being valued less than if a man had performed it. Sandler and Hall indicated several ways accomplishments by women are devalued. Studies indicate that "...the same professional accomplishments are seen as superior in quality and worthy of higher rewards when attributed to men than when attributed to women (Sandler and Hall 6)." In addition, the successes attributed to men are "resulting from internal factors" and women's success is "often attributed to external factors" (Sandler and Hall 6). An example of this behavior can be seen in instances which women get a job because they had to hire a female, while a male is hired because he is qualified.

This discrimination within the structure of Academia is not the only problem female instructors and female teaching assistants face. The discrimination within the classroom is harder to address and only just recently recognized. Students have been found to discriminate against teachers in different ways. Subtle differences in teaching evaluations is one way. Sexual harassment in the classroom is another way.

Studies have found that in the classroom female instructors are evaluated on different criteria than male instructors, forced to adhere to sexual stereotypes for good evaluations, and those

stereotypes women must follow are valued beneath the stereotypes of men. Diane Kierstead, Patti D'Agostino and Heidi Dill found in their study that;

> "...much more so than their male colleagues, female instructors are likely to have their competence judged by male students on the basis of personal characteristics typically associated with feminine behavior, such as friendliness, frequent eye contact and regular smiles (344)."

Students expect teachers who provide both masculine and feminine teaching styles, but devalue women instructors who use male teaching styles, such as assertiveness and rigid grading. Debra B. Hull, and John H. Hull found in their study that students, in evaluations, appreciate "traditional, assertive, content-oriented style of teaching and an expressive, person-centered style (490)." The traditional, assertive style has been considered more masculine in nature and expressive, person-centered style is considered more feminine. Students value both styles, however, the masculine teaching style has a higher value. When students evaluate instructors on different factor such as the ones mentioned, they are repeating actions which devalue women. "Students see a male teacher as good because of instrumental factors--what he does; a female teacher is seen as good because of expressive or personality factors--what she is (Hull 490)." This is similar to the techniques used in professional situations to make the accomplishments of women seem lessened.

Because students value both styles in a good teacher, Hull and Hull believes that this may be responsible "for the

fact that on broad overall evaluations, one generally finds no significant difference in ratings given by students to male and female teachers (490)." However, there is a difference.

Students have two sets of expectations for female instructors. "Women are supposed to be warm, friendly, supportive and deferential, yet professionals are supposed to be objective, authoritarian, and critical (Kierstead 342)." Straying too far to one side of this equation can result in lower evaluations (Kierstead 342). Bernice R. Sandler wrote in "Women Faculty at Work in the Classroom, or , Why it Still Hurts to Be a Woman in Labor" that students "expect women to be more personal and more supportive and motherly than their male teachers (7)." However, if a female teacher is too friendly or pleasant, then she may be seen as "too feminine (Sandler 7)." Of course, if she attempts to be stronger or assertive, she is penalized for being "too masculine (Sandler 7)."

Women have a fine line to walk in order to please students. Sandler indicated that "women faculty are often caught in a double bind: no matter how they act their behavior is 'not quite right (7)." Students, because of their beliefs of how a male and female teacher must act, also tend to give a woman lower evaluation even if she is fulfilling her role. The reason women still lose out is that "Demanding, aggressive, abstract, content-centered teachers have been assumed to be the best teachers (Hull 494)", which are qualities students devalue in a female instructor. Kierstead summed it up by saying,

"Similarly, Bennett's data revealed that

> students are less tolerant of female instructors in a number of respects, expecting more of them than their male colleagues in both educational and interpersonal aspects of teaching (344)."

Evaluations are not the only way students can discriminate against female instructors. A more destructive and harmful way is in the form of sexual harassment. Some people contend that teachers cannot be sexually harassed because the student has no power over the teacher, therefore there can be no misuse of power which constitutes harassment (Grauerholz 790). However, other researcher believe differently, victims can hold formal power over the abuser, called contrapower harassment (Grauerholz 790). This can occur for two reasons, says Grauerholz, one, "the anonymity of the student's behavior serves to reverse the power relationship between the professor and student (790)" and two, female professors hold no power in the gender relationship, "and this may be the more essential power difference in the case of sexual harassment (790)."

This type of sexual harassment can be very harmful to the female instructor. It can "interfere with the professor's work and professional growth, undermine her sense of confidence and authority, and have damaging effects on relationships with students (Grauerholz 790)." Teaching assistants may suffer even more from this type of sexual harassment because of their unique situation. These instructors do not have the protection of greater age differences, past teaching experience, and authority in the academic community to fight this harassment. In addition, with critics, like Anderson, who discredit all

teaching assistants with blanket accusations, respect and power for female TA's is hard to come by.

Grauerholz studied contrapower harassment in the classroom and found that it did occur. The categories for sexual harassment included undue attention, obscene phone calls from suspected students, verbal sexual comments, body language, written sexual comments, physical advances, explicit sexual propositions and sexual bribery (793). Nearly half of those studied, 47.6 percent, indicated experiencing one of those behaviors, and of those, 59.1 percent experienced two or more of those behaviors. The instructors surveyed also indicated that the majority agreed that most of the behaviors described are sexual harassment (Grauerholz 794).

Sexual harassment from students can come in many forms. Sandler and Hall found that male students put pressure on female instructors for special treatment in late assignment, or extra help (15). Male students tend to call female instructors by their first names, or by other inappropriate terms such as "honey", and also make inappropriate comments about physical looks or clothing. Although male students interrupt male and female instructors, female instructors are interrupted significantly more than male instructors (Sandler and Hall 15). Sandler also found in her later article that female instructors often face their authority threatened by male students through inappropriate questions. Male students inquire credentials and indicate surprise at their ability, for example, "Are you really tenured? Do you really have a doctorate? I can't believe

you're a professor (Sandler 7)."

Female instructors usually deal with the harassment in several ways. In the Grauerholz article, of those who indicated how they addressed the problem, 58 percent did nothing. A variety of reasons were found for this such as "it didn't seem serious enough or there was nothing they could do (as in the case of anonymous messages)." The second largest category of response was to confront the student directly, which seemed to work best, possibly because the instructors reasserted their authority and power. Avoiding the individual was used in 33 percent of the instances (796). Unfortunately, 9 percent of those doing nothing did so because they feared repercussions (Grauerholz 796). This may have been because, as one instructor indicated, "while students may not be much of a professional threat, they are no less a potential physical threat (Grauerholz 795)."

The question of why students feel they need to harass female instructors seem to stem from the male student's difficulty in accepting women in power. Sandler indicated that male students may have to deal with few female faculty members, or professional women. Their main dealings with women are in sexual or social situations. Therefore in their "confusion between social and professional" roles of women, they revert to the role they know best, a social-sexual one (11). These views sometimes are reinforced by male faculty members in other classes or in social situations (Sandler 12). Grauerholz reported similar findings, that some men are "uncomfortable with, or

resent, women in authority" and their inappropriate actions may be a way of rebelling against the female power, or "an attempt on these students' part to assert their authority and dominance" (800).

The danger of this sexual harassment is to undermine the instructor's confidence and power. Grauerholz indicated that it can "serve to remind women that 'no matter what work a woman is doing, she is still a woman and therefore a sex object' (800)." In addition, it may undermine her association with her job and limit her success (Grauerholz 800). The woman's power in this situation is formal power of the educational institution, however the male student controls the power inherent in his gender, which may explain her vulnerability to the harassment (Grauerholz 798). In the case of teaching assistants, the women have less formal power than their full faculty counterparts and the harassment may be harder to deal with.

Obviously female faculty and teaching assistants face unique problems in and out of the classroom. They deal with micro-inequities and devaluation within the educational structure by peers and superiors. In addition, the female instructors must deal with discrimination in student evaluations of their teaching and, in some cases, sexual harassment from students. Sandler commented that,

> "Men and women, teaching in the same classroom, teaching the same subject to the same students, have very different experiences. The classroom is a friendlier, more encouraging, and reinforcing environment for male faculty. It is far more stressful and chillier for women faculty. It gnaws at women's self-esteem, which is often low

to begin with (12)."

The women in the field of teaching, and those who train to be teachers in the teaching assistant capacity face hard challenges in their careers. Although correcting the inequities in the system may be as difficult as a complete social structure overhaul, there may be some small ways to bring about some relief to the female professors and teaching assistants.

First, the faculty must be aware of the problem. Realizing the problem begins the process of creating a warmer and more equitable climate for women to educate students. Second, those in the educational institution, from administrators to faculty must strive to recognize and eliminate the "Micro-inequities (Hall 3)." This may be done through dialogue in both organized workshops or simple day-to-day conversation. Changing the students' stereotypes may not be achievable, because of the grand scope of this problem. Societal views seem to influence this problem, and a mere four years with the students may not be powerful enough to change those views. However, a third way to help correct the problem may be in simply allowing the students to see that the administration and faculty are no longer devaluing female instructors. Putting more women in the classroom, as teaching assistants and professors may achieve this goal, as well providing male students opportunities to accept women in power. Finally, sexual harassment in the classroom must be recognized. Female instructors and teaching assistants must be trained to protect themselves from this harassment. In addition, the educational institutions must

also take this issue seriously and offer support and protection to those instructors facing contrapower harassment.

The road to the temple is filled with pitfalls and barriers for women. Unfortunately, for female novices, the teaching assistants, the pitfalls are deeper, and the barriers are higher. Discrimination from faculty and administration, skewed evaluations from students and sexual harassment in the classroom may discourage the brightest of women from this track. However, with enlightenment, support, and the experience the teaching assistant system allows, these barriers may fall, and allow the women back into the temple of education.

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